

March 13, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Nikole Powell, also known as inmate number 111992. I am a resident on the Supervised Community Confinement Program, also known as SCCP and I have been in recovery since June of 2019. I am also a mother, a student and a harm reductionist and I am here today representing the voices of so many other inmates who cannot be here.

I stand before you today in support of LD 178 as a currently incarcerated woman, someone who has been thriving on the Supervised Community Confinement Program since May of 2022, and someone who believes that these programs work.

I believe that everyone deserves a second chance. If we truly believe that the Judicial System was created as a way for people who committed crimes to pay off their debt, learn to assimilate into society and rehabilitate, we need to offer parole as an option for people who are doing the hard work of making positive change in their lives.

SCCP is a shining example of growth and change. However, for inmates with long sentences, or inmates with certain charges, they are either not eligible or SCCP isn't offered until the very end of their sentence. But, with a parole board built with members of the prison, there could be an objective process to review the progress of incarcerated individuals. And in return, those who are sitting behind bars could have the chance to share their accomplishments and the hard work they have done to better their own lives, and the lives of their families, friends, and the larger community.

Since being released on this program, I have accomplished so many things I would not have achieved being locked up: I've managed a sober home, became certified in Peer Support 101 and recovery coaching. I also worked with the Maine Recovery Advocacy Project to pass the Good Samaritan Law, helped organize a team to launch this parole legislation and brought REFORM Alliance onto our team. I enrolled in college and became certified in The Science of Substance Use Disorder, and now I have an amazing job at the Church of Safe Injection as a peer navigator distributing harm reduction supplies and doing outreach in several counties.

I have a positive working relationship with probation and police and have been asked to share my journey at various events. Most recently I was invited to tell my story to probation supervisors and the Maine State Prison wardens.

If we believe that prison systems are truly designed to rehabilitate people, then we need the option of parole. I am a living example that the mistakes people make do not define them. I am a woman in recovery, a harm reductionist and a mother and I am here today representing so many voices of people who cannot be here and whose voices cannot be heard.